



I often see the summer train go gliding fast and free
With all the animals that make the big menagerie.
But now it isn't summer time, and not a circus comes
With trick mules and with ostriches, with trumpets and with drums.
'Tis now the winding winter train that's climbing up the hill.
All full of toy menageries the stockings long to fill.
And make my Christmas merry when at noon I rise and dress.
Because I'm pretty sure it is the Santa Claus Express.

I know that on that lovely train that comes from Fairyland
The hobby horse is full of smiles, the elephant is grand.
The camel's brown, the turtle's green, the cockle is white.
The monkey on the yellow stick is grinning with delight.
I hear the whistle blow as through the frosted pine I glance.
And in my joy upon the chair I wave my hand and dance
And to the locomotive shout, with vim, I must confess.
Three cheers and a toy tiger for the Santa Claus Express!

Good Santa Claus is up to date and so beneath the stars
And 'neath the sun he sends around his Noah's ark in cars.
And his expressman, coming up the path with look forlorn,
Brings in a bundle I must not open till Christmas morn.
Of course I don't know what it is, but I am sure 'tis fine.
And some of it is brother Tom's, and some of it is mine.
And I am sure 'twill come up to and beat my biggest guess.
Because 'twas brought to us upon the Santa Claus Express.

Now I'll be just as very good as ever, I can be.
That dear old Santa may become the friend of little me.
And some day let me go with him upon his jolly train.
Whence iron deer is gliding now across the snowy plain.
And after that delightful trip, I think my little plan
'twill surely be to ask him when I am a great big man
To give me work and let me work till I have won success.
And am the proud conductor of the Santa Claus Express.
R. K. MURKITTICK.

THE ORDEAL BY GIFTS

A CHRISTMAS STORY BY PETER McARTHUR.

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BECAUSE Jean was born on Christmas day no one was surprised at her many little peculiarities. She certainly was "not like other girls," and, although it may seem like making too great a concession to the superstitions, it must be admitted that her most striking peculiarities were due to this accident of birth. Of course it had nothing to do with her unlikeliness to other girls in being more beautiful than any of them, but it certainly was the cause of a strange moroseness that seemed to overwhelm her every year when her birthday came around. It was first noticed when she was a child, and wise people said she would outgrow it, but they were mistaken. Every year her birthday brought a period of discontent, and because of a strain of Scotch reticence in her nature she would not explain what was weighing on her mind. It is true that as she grew older she changed somewhat, but it was in a way that made this peculiarity more marked. When she was old enough to have admirers, it was noticed that she almost invariably broke off with them at Christmas, and when asked to explain her conduct she quoted from an ancient ballad she had read at the seminary:

Who on Christ his day is born
Shall rede aright both love and scorn.
"Because I was born on Christmas," she used to say, "I have a power to know which of my friends are true and which are false, but if I explain this power to any one I shall lose it."

Of course this sounded very absurd in the last years of the nineteenth century, but it was finally demonstrated that her power had a thoroughly reasonable foundation. But it compelled her to weed down her friends and admirers to a pitifully small group and might have destroyed her life's happiness when the real Prince Charming came to woo, but for the fact that Cupid always looks after his own.

From the time she was 17 till she was 22 Jean dismissed from one to a dozen admirers every Christmas without explanation, and people were beginning to believe that she was doomed to die an old maid. In the November of her twentieth year she became engaged to an attractive young man, and some thought the spell was broken, but she dismissed him so contemptuously at Christmas and with such outspoken scorn that it became a saying among her friends that she would never get married until a young man appeared who could hold her fancy through the Christmas season. She admitted the truth of this statement and continued to wait the coming of the right man.

When Harry Finlay came to the town to act as cashier in the local bank, he immediately struck up a warm friendship with the beautiful but decidedly peculiar girl. Well meaning friends warned him of her Christmas habits, but in his eyes the touch of mystery only added to her charm. He paid court to her ardently and with such success that toward the end of autumn she consented to be his wife. But when he asked that she wait for a year until he received an expected promotion to the position of manager she showed signs of uneasiness, and when, in addition, he asked her to

and asked her to explain, but much as she would have liked to warn him of the snare into which her previous admirers had fallen she could not do so, for she had registered a vow to keep her secret. She did promise, however, that if he escaped the danger she would explain everything to him after Christmas.

"If you love me truly and are the noble, generous soul I believe you to be, there is no danger," she said to him.

"I am not so sure of my nobility and generosity," he said, "but I am very sure that I love you, and I will walk as circumspectly as I can."

As the Christmas season came around Jean's anxiety increased; but, like the healthy, big hearted soul he was, Harry practically dismissed the whole matter from his mind and went his way as if he were not undergoing a test on which his whole future happiness depended.

As the little jeweler in the town did not have a very large assortment of presents Harry found it difficult to select a suitable one for Jean. He wanted to give her something out of the common run, but as he felt that in view of the necessity for saving money toward housekeeping he must not spend more than \$10 his diffi-



"WELL, I CALL IT A SKIN GAME."

culty was greatly increased. In order to help him out the jeweler gave him an illustrated catalogue and told him to select the design he wanted and he would send to the city for it. Harry acted on the suggestion and worked over that catalogue for almost a week. He marked at least 20 designs of pins, brooches, bracelets and such trinkets before he decided on a brooch that took his fancy. He then took a rubber and erased the marks he had made before designs he had rejected and then sent back the catalogue by a messenger with a note saying, "Get me what I have marked."

On the day before Christmas the jeweler sent him a package and with it a bill for \$20. Harry expected a bill for only \$10, so he opened the parcel to find out if possible what was the cause of the extra charge. He then found that, besides the brooch, the jeweler had sent him a bracelet he had admired very much and which he at first thought of ordering. But he didn't order it, and, besides, not being able to afford it, he had no intention of being imposed upon in this way. Taking the jewels with him, he hurried to the dealer and asked him to explain.

"Why, I sent you only what you ordered," protested the jeweler.

"I ordered only the brooch," said Harry.

"Pardon me," said the jeweler. "You sent me word to order what you had marked, and I did. You marked both the brooch and the pin."

"Oh, no; I didn't," replied Harry. "I rubbed out all the marks I made except the one for the brooch."

Instead of pursuing the argument the jeweler went to his desk and brought out the marked catalogue. Sure enough, the two items were marked. He had evidently overlooked the mark before the bracelet when erasing the others.

"But I don't want the bracelet," he said.

"I can't help that," replied the jeweler. "You ordered it, and I simply filled your order."

"But you surely are not going to insist that I take it?"

"There is nothing else left for me to do. The mistake was your own, and I can't be expected to bear the loss. The jewel is a very pretty one, but I could not hope to sell it here within a year, and I must pay the New York house for it."

"Well, I call that a skin game," said Harry, losing his temper. The jeweler promptly lost his temper also, and they indulged in a rather undignified quarrel. Finally Harry paid the bill and exclaimed as he did so:

"If I live in this town 50 years, I'll never buy another thing here."

"Well, I'll not be losing my best customer," replied the jeweler, with a sneer. When Harry reached his room, he took out the two jewels and looked at them. They were both very pretty and tasteful, but he felt that they were more than he could afford just then.

"Why," he said to himself, "I might as well have added \$30 more to the amount and bought her the engagement ring."

Having the jewels, he decided, of

course, that he must give them both to Jean, even though she might think him extravagant in spending so much on them when he was saving up for their home. While thinking the matter over it suddenly occurred to him that he could make things look more reasonable if he sent the brooch as a Christmas present and the bracelet as a birthday gift. That would justify them both. Replacing the jewels in their boxes with appropriate cards, he took them to the postoffice and mailed them so that she would get them the first thing in the morning.

When he went to Jean's home to have his Christmas dinner with her, he found her radiantly happy. The gloom that he was told always oppressed her on Christmas was nowhere in evidence. Her greeting to him was more affectionate than it had ever been before, and he felt that, besides wishing him a merry Christmas, she was doing all in her power to make it so for him. When they were finally left alone in the parlor after dinner, she said she wanted to thank him again for his Christmas present and birthday gift.

There is only one way for lovers to express such thanks, and after a furtive glance toward the doors and windows it was so expressed. After the customary pause of happy silence Jean whispered as she hid her face on his bosom:

"I felt sure all along that you would pass the test all right. You are so noble and so generous. I loved you so much that I wanted to tell you all about it, but if I did there would be no test. I know it was silly, but I vowed once that I would test all my friends this way, as well as any one who made love to me, and you know it has given me the reputation of being odd."

"But what is the test?" asked Harry in surprise, at the same time rejoicing that he had passed it successfully.

"Can't you guess? No, no; you could never guess, for you are too thoughtful and generous ever to think of doing anything else than what you did."

Harry puffed out his chest and felt good while he waited for her to proceed.

"You see, it is just like this: I was born on Christmas day, and superstitious people say that is what makes me different from every one else, but no one has ever guessed the real reason. All the other children had a birthday as well as Christmas every year, but I had to be satisfied with one day for both. Besides, I usually had to be satisfied with only one present. When I was a child, that used to make me feel cheated, and I brooded over it till I was morbidly sensitive on the point, but as I grew older it occurred to me that it gave me a chance to find out which of my friends were really thoughtful and cared for me very much. They were the ones who remembered my birthday and Christmas, just as you did, and the ones who lent me out of a present I just had very little more to do with. Of course it is not the presents I think so much about, but the thoughtfulness, though when I was younger the presents used to count too."

"And so that was what was at the bottom of all the endings of friendships that have happened with you every Christmas?"

"Yes."

"And was it because Tom Harland did not think to give you a Christmas present and birthday gift that you broke off the engagement with him?"

"Don't let us speak about that creature."

"But I want to speak about him. You have never explained why you broke off

the engagement with him. Surely, if you loved him, you didn't break off just because he was not present short."

"I never loved him."

"But you were engaged to him."

"Yes, but I didn't know then what love means. Even if he had passed my foolish test I would still have parted from him, for I did not know my own mind when I consented to be engaged to him."

"But it was at Christmas you broke off with him. Wasn't that because of the test?"

"Well, yes, it was, but he failed in his requirements in a way that I had not previously dreamed possible. Why, that man actually brought me an engagement ring for Christmas, and it was to serve as an engagement ring. Christmas present and birthday gift all in one. That was beyond anything in the way of true economy that I had ever heard of, and it opened my eyes to the kind of man he was. But you must always remember, dear, that it is not the presents I value,

but the thoughtfulness that prompts them."

As Harry recalled his quarrel with the jeweler and his regret that he had not spent \$30 more and got an engagement ring, instead of the two presents, he didn't feel quite so proud of himself as he did at first, but he wisely concluded to accept the good that the gods had sent to him, and he let Jean praise him to her heart's content.

He felt, however, that something should be done in the way of atonement, so he went around to the jeweler's next day, after apologizing profusely for the many unkind things he had said when they had quarreled, asked for a catalogue from which to select an engagement ring with a solitaire in it that he can order as soon as he has saved up enough money or secured the promotion to the position of manager that he is waiting for. Jean, of course, is very happy and thinks, after all, that it was not such a hardship to have been born on Christmas, as it enabled her to discover what a noble, thoughtful and generous fellow her fiance is, and he, having had such a narrow escape, will doubtless be very careful to show the qualities for which he accidentally, though perhaps justly, gets credit.

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